

Literarische Übersetzung als Werkzeug des Sprachausbaus: am Beispiel Papiamentu.
[Abhandlungen zur Sprache und Literatur 87.] By Eva Martha Eckkrammer. Bonn:
Romanistischer Verlag. 1996. (314 pages.)

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Question: What is the best-kept secret in Creole Studies? Answer: German-language publications! The requirement of publication in German for postgraduate pursuits in Germany results in many a gem being inaccessible to the wider Creole audience. Eckkrammer's case-study of the history, practice, and sociopolitical context of literary translation into and out of Papiamentu is one such gem. Thoroughly researched and the discussion insightfully placed within the broader context of the function of literary translation for small languages¹, it deserves to be widely read in a field where applied studies are woefully under-represented. Eckkrammer presents her work as a "pilot project", it being the first attempt to provide a translation study of a creole language. We would hope that this pilot will set the standards for any future such studies.

In six chapters, overviews of the functions of literary translation for small or minority languages, of the historical and sociocultural background of Papiamentu, of the role and position of literary translators of Papiamentu, and of the role of language planning in relation to Papiamentu, are presented. A detailed discussion of the different genres of Papiamentu literary translations, methodological issues in relation to a selection of translated works, and a discussion of the future prospects of Papiamentu literary translation, are further provided. The 7th and final chapter is a bibliography². In the following we will focus on the discussion of literary translation *into* Papiamentu.

Eckkrammer argues that where a small linguistic community can produce but few original literary works, literary translation can contribute to building a substantial written corpus. Where standardization of the language has not been fully achieved, such a written corpus can be instrumental in the diffusion of norms and in the creation of new stylistic literary registers. The corpus of literary texts which is thus created further helps to raise the sociocultural prestige of the language. This may in turn contribute to its expansion into non-literary areas such as legislation. Translation thus has the potential to make a vital contribution to the development of a small language such as Papiamentu. The now imminent introduction of Papiamentu as the language of instruction in the first years of primary education in most schools in Curaçao, further requires the availability of a substantial corpus of juvenile

¹ Eckkrammer's term *Kleinsprache*, translated here as "small language" is based on a quantitative measure, referring to languages of no more than appr. 5 million speakers. Papiamentu has appr. 260,000 speakers, the majority of which reside in the Caribbean islands Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. There is also a small expatriate community in the Netherlands.

² The bibliography is divided into 2 main parts, with a further subdivision into a total of 11 sections. This sometimes makes it difficult to locate references, but I believe I did note a few omissions (Daantje 1974, Römer-Maduro-Jones 1975). I would like to note also that many of the Dutch quotes in the text are marred by typing errors. The author has obviously been very careful with Papiamentu quotes, which contain few errors.

literature. All of this puts the Papiamentu translator into a position of considerable responsibility. Regrettably, the Papiamentu translator finds little recognition or support for her/his task, as we shall see below.

Eckkrammer takes a broad view of "literary" production, including catechisms, Bible-translations, folk-lore, film scenarios, juvenile literature, translations of "truly" literary texts, etc. Translation in the 19th century is by and large restricted to catechisms and Bible-translations. The 20th century, in particular the post-World War II period, sees a diversification of the literary genres. It also sees a dramatic increase in the publication of original work in Papiamentu, but nonetheless, the contribution of translations to the total literary production remains substantial. Over the period 1825-1994, Eckkrammer arrives at a total of 369 translated works, of which 343 translated into Papiamentu, 26 translated out of Papiamentu. Predictably, most translations are between Dutch and Papiamentu, including many "2nd hand" translations of non-original Dutch works.

With few exceptions, Papiamentu translators are non-professionals, including several linguists, authors who produce translations in addition to original work, and a variety of other persons who share an interest in Papiamentu. Papiamentu translators have to carry out their work without a reference grammar, without bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, even without a fully accepted orthography. There are several language planning institutions in the islands which attempt to address these problems, but they are powerless to change the divisive insular political traditions, which have resulted in different orthographies in Aruba on the one hand, Curaçao and Bonaire on the other, and in the breaking up of an already small audience into several even smaller ones.

While there is no dearth of highly motivated – though not always equally accomplished – translators, publication and distribution of translated work is problematic: publishing houses as well as bookshops on the islands generally display little interest in Papiamentu publications, forcing many authors and translators into self-publishing. According to Eckkrammer, the accumulation of problems for the translator/author calls for government intervention. However, as she points out, the government's priorities are with utilitarian translations (health care brochures, government guidelines, etc.), and in as much as literary translation is seen as a priority, it is in the area of juvenile literature, to support Papiamentu as a language of instruction in the schools. It seems unlikely then, that substantial support for literary translations, in particular of non-juvenile literature, is forthcoming.

The area of literary production which displays the greatest continuity is that of religious texts. Even in the modern period, the production of religious literary translations far exceeds any other genre. Translated drama productions³ had their heyday in the 1960s and have seen a steady decline since, due in great measure to the cultural-political mood of the 1970s, which militated against foreign cultural influence. In the area of prose translations, the developments of the 1970s are reflected in the rise of juvenile literary translations in the 1980s, at the expense of translations targetting a non-juvenile audience. Throughout, poetry translations occupy a small minority position. In each genre, Eckkhammer shows that translations cover a

³ Eckkrammer points out that most drama translations reviewed in her study did not see publication, yet merit inclusion based on the fact that these drama productions were performed in front of an audience.

continuum from faithful renditions of an original text to fairly drastic adaptations involving (culturally appropriate) adjustments.

In many respects, Eckkrammer's study is a celebration of the best of Papiamentu literary translation, and a tribute to some outstanding Papiamentu translators. Papiamentu's literary translation tradition obviously gives it a lead on other Creole languages of the Caribbean, and despite all the problems noted in the study, Eckkrammer sees a bright future ahead. This bright future is however very dependent on government support for literary translations. She expresses the hope that this will not be exclusively directed towards the production of juvenile literature, and recommends participation in international literary exchange. She appears to have abandoned reality however, where she points out that no literary translation should be endeavoured unless a publisher and funding have been secured. If translators were to take this admonition seriously, we might not see much more substantial translated work in Papiamentu. Instead, I would like to express the hope that literary translators will continue to do what they believe in, government support or no, so that there will be much more material in the future for studies which build on Eckkrammer's pioneer work.

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